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# Afghanistan: Party Factionalism and Fratricide

**An Intelligence Assessment**

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*NESA 84-10132  
April 1984*

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# **Afghanistan: Party Factionalism and Fratricide**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [ ] Office  
of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a  
contribution from [ ] Office of  
Central Reference. It was coordinated with the  
Directorate of Operations. [ ]

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**Afghanistan: Party  
Factionalism and  
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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 1 March 1984  
was used in this report.*

A deep rift in the ruling People's Democratic (Communist) Party of Afghanistan is seriously impeding the Soviet and Afghan military effort, hampering the operation of the Afghan Government, and weakening the regime's claim to legitimacy. Moscow's inability to resolve the party split in the near term will hamper the Soviets' consolidation of control over Afghanistan. Use of force to purge either faction would cause widespread insurrection in the Afghan Government and military.

Factionalism contributes to the regime's security problems:

- Disaffected faction members in the military have killed Soviet and Afghan officers.
- Military promotions along factional lines have resulted in low morale, desertions, and collaboration with the insurgents.
- Sabotage and assassinations occur.

Factionalism also impedes the effective functioning of the government by distracting the leadership, diverting expertise, and restricting information exchanges.

To deal with the party rift, the Soviets have used an evenhanded approach and an extensive indoctrination program:

- The Soviets have permitted President Babrak Karmal to surround himself with loyalists but have also supported rival faction members.
- The Soviets have removed the most partisan factional leaders from the Afghan scene for long periods through "training" and ambassadorship assignments.
- Extensive Soviet indoctrination programs concentrate on youthful members of the party.

A strong, unified government in Kabul is unlikely for many years. Without a regime that will ensure stability and a continued pro-Soviet orientation, the Soviets are likely to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely.

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### Party Growth, Parchami Power

The split in the People's Democratic (Communist) Party began soon after the party's founding in 1965, and by 1966 Khalq and Parcham became separate factions. Each took its name from party newspapers. In 1977 the two factions united under Soviet pressure but only papered over their differences, which reappeared in July 1978, a few months after the party came to power. In the next few months, the Khalqis exiled or jailed most important Parchamis and dominated the Communist movement until December 1979, when Soviet troops overthrew the Khalqis and installed a government in which both factions were represented. The Parchamis, however, had a clear edge. Since then, the Parchamis have gained slowly at Khalqi expense. [ ]

According to US Embassy sources, the Communists strengthened their presence throughout the government in 1983. Pressure to join the party has intensified, and party organizers have become more influential in forcing government personnel to attend meetings and rallies and to participate in organizational activities. A strong inducement to join the party is the perception that the Soviets are not going to be forced out of Afghanistan and that accommodation to their presence must be made. [ ]

Although the size of the party in Kabul and the degree of commitment to it may have risen, the regime's inability to deter assassinations has hampered party growth. [ ] US Embassy sources report that a jibe often heard in Kabul's bazaars is "Join the party and die." The party's influence outside the capital is almost nil, according to US Embassy sources [ ] Although Kabul has become a base from which Communist control could expand, the resistance so far has prevented that expansion. [ ]

[ ] pressure to join the party has been particularly keen on Afghan military officers because Soviet advisers are reluctant to work with those who have refused membership. At staff

meetings, officers are left with the impression that refusal to join may result in early retirement and loss of pension. Although candidates cannot specify factional association, the new member is informally recruited into one faction or the other depending on his job and prior association with colleagues who may also be party members. [ ]

An indication of recent growth is the proportion of youths among party members. Kabul media in July 1983 claimed that 65 percent of party members were under age 30 and that 20 percent of the armed forces were party members. [ ] approximately 80 percent are under age 30, and about 10 percent of the military belong to the party. [ ]

[ ] young civil servants are attracted to the party by promises of good pay, monthly food subsidies, and career advancement. [ ] only 20 to 30 percent of party members are ideologically committed. Most activists are assigned to KHAD, the regime's intelligence service, and to sensitive ministries. [ ] approximately 80 percent of the personnel in the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs are party members, and about half of the personnel in the Ministry of Finance also belong. [ ]

The Khalqis remain a majority in the lower ranks of the Ministry of Defense and throughout the Ministry of Interior. [ ] US Embassy officials believe the Parcham faction is slowly gaining over the Khalqis through recent appointments to key positions in the Army and Air Force and high-level civilian posts, including four ambassadorships in the Communist world. [ ]

[ ] in spring 1983 Parchamis were installed as commanders of Air Force wings and as political officers. Appointments at the 12th plenum in mid-1983 reduced the proportion of Khalqis in the Politburo and Central Committee to about 25 percent, [ ]

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## Afghanistan: Party Factionalism and Fratricide <sup>1</sup>

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The rift between the dominant Parcham (Banner) faction and the larger Khalq (Masses) faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan has been wide since the late 1970s, [redacted]. In our judgment, factional differences have intensified in the past year. [redacted] describes the split as "tremendous," "very personalized," and "venomous." We estimate that there are about 40,000 party members and candidates, though the regime publicly claims 90,000. We further estimate that about 40 percent are Parchamis and about 60 percent Khalqis. [redacted] the Parchamis control most influential government posts (see table 1). The Khalqis, however, predominate in the military, particularly in the junior ranks. Both factions lavishly praise the Soviets in public, though, in private, members of both factions are critical of Soviet control, [redacted]. Neither faction reflects any pro-Western sentiment. [redacted]

### Causes of the Party Rift

#### Social and Ethnic Differences

Differences over political tactics may have been one of the original causes of the Parcham-Khalq schism, [redacted] with the early Khalqis favoring revolutionary extremism and the Parchamis favoring more moderate tactics. We believe, however, that the basic differences between the factions are social and ethnic. Parchamis tend to come from urban and middle- or upper-class backgrounds and Khalqis from the rural lower class. Nearly all Khalqis are Pathan (Pashtun), while nearly all Parchamis are from other ethnic groups. [redacted]

Social and ethnic differences among the traditionally volatile Afghans are often sufficient cause for distrust and strife within the party, [redacted]

[redacted] The disunity is complicated by subfactions, which generally develop as personal followings, [redacted]

[redacted] (see table 2). According to US Embassy reports, at the 12th party plenum in July 1983, President Babrak decried party members' "lack of desire and ability to work in an organized and cooperative manner and to have friendly and comradely relations with each other." Babrak blamed disunity on an atmosphere of tribalism, family ties, ambition, favoritism, localism, and lack of mutual respect. Parchami policies, in turn, came under sharp criticism because they had not led to any increase in party or regime control over the country. Security, especially for party members and regime officials, was deteriorating throughout the country, the economy was worsening, and insurgent activity was increasing. [redacted]

#### Factional Issues

In our judgment, the underlying social and ethnic differences have given rise to numerous parochial issues that intensify the party split. We believe the primary issue dividing the factions—and at times the cause of disputes within factions—is rivalry over professional advancement. Parchami efforts to dislodge Khalqi Interior Minister Gulabzoi—apparently to neutralize his influence and to gain control of his ministry's political and military resources—have been a major source of tension. [redacted] in 1983 Parchamis accused Gulabzoi of conspiring against the party for personal gain and called for his resignation. Rivalry over the advancement issue has been especially intense in the armed forces, according to US Embassy reports [redacted]

**Table 1**  
**Factional Affiliations of Key Persons**

Position	Name <sup>a</sup>	Comment
<b>Central Committee</b>		
Secretary	Mir Sahib Karwal (P)	Influential commander of the Central Security Zone.
Secretary	Zuhur Razmjo (P)*	Secretary of the Kabul City Party Committee.
Secretary	Muhammad Yasin Saddiqi (P)*	Chief of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Defense.
Member	Abdol Majid Sarbuland (U)*	Deputy Prime Minister.
Member	Imtiaz Hassan (P)*	Former Ambassador to Bulgaria.
Member	Shah Mohammad Dost (I)*	Minister of Foreign Affairs.
Member	Habib Mangal (P)	Ambassador to USSR, first cousin to Deputy Prime Minister Sarwar Mangal.
Member	Maj. Gen. Gul Aqa (P)*	Vehemently anti-Khalq.
Member	Najmuddin Akhgar Kawyani (U)*	
Member	Nizamuddin Tahzib (P)	Chief Justice of Qonduz Province.
Member	Jamillah Palwasha (P)*	Relative of Babrak and Finance Minister Wakil.
Member	Abdul Wakil (P)*	Minister of Finance, first cousin to Babrak; has shown independence, exchanged death threats with Prime Minister Keshmand, and denounced some Parchamis as opportunists.
Member	Solayman Laeq (P)*	Minister of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs; many consider him an independent.
Member	Sayed Muhammad Gulabzoi (K)	Minister of Interior, head of the Khalq faction.
Member	Ghulam Jilani Bakhtari (P)*	Ambassador to Hungary, first cousin and devout follower of Babrak.
Member	Wasif Bakhtari (U)	
Candidate member	Sayed Amin Shah Zara (P)*	
Candidate member	Sayed Akram Paigir (P)*	Chief of the Northern Security Zone.
Candidate member	Hunar Ghairat (K)*	
Candidate member	Abdul Samad Azhar (P)*	Ambassador to Cuba.
Candidate member	Khodadad Basharmal (U)	Chief of the Eastern Security Zone.
<b>Politburo</b>		
Chairman	Babrak Karmal (P)	President of Afghanistan, General Secretary of the People's Democratic Party.
Member	Nur Ahmad Nur (P)*	Undergoing "training" in Moscow.
Member	Najibullah (P)*	Director of KHAD.
Member	Saleh Muhammad Ziray (K)*	Head of the National Fatherland Front (propaganda organization).
Member	Lt. Gen. Muhammad Rafi (P)*	Deputy Prime Minister, former Minister of Defense; violently anti-Khalq.
Member	Muhammad Esmail Danesh (K)	Minister of Mines and Industries.
Member	Ghulam Dastagir Panjshiri (K)	Often votes with Parchamis.
Member	Mahmud Baryalai (P)*	Babrak's brother.
Candidate member	Abdul Qader (P)	Minister of Defense.
Candidate member	Sayed Tahir Shah Paykargar (P)*	

<sup>a</sup> P = Parcham  
K = Khalq

I = independent  
U = unknown  
Asterisk (\*) indicates Babrak supporters, when known.

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**Table 2**  
**Parchami and Khalqi Subfactions**

Faction	Comment
<b>Parchami</b>	
President Babrak Karmal group	Holds more influence than all other groups combined; comprises approximately 80 percent of Parchamis.
Prime Minister Keshtmand group	More a following than a subfaction; vies with Babrak's group in seeking favor with Moscow.
Mir Sahib Karwal's group	Minor influence.
<b>Khalqi<sup>a</sup></b>	
Interior Minister Gulabzoi group	Most influential Khalqi group; Gulabzoi acts as the head of the entire faction.
Politburo member Panjsheri group	Maintains close links with Parchamis; not trusted by either faction.
Ambassador Sarwari group	Little influence following Sarwari's posting to Mongolia; known for brutality.
Minister of Mines and Industries Danesh group	Minor influence.
Communications Minister Watanjar group	Minor influence.

<sup>a</sup> Khalqi officials such as Politburo member Ziray and Deputy Prime Minister Aryan frequently shift affiliation to support Parchami policies, probably to take advantage of what many Khalqi officials perceive as growing support for the Parchamis.

Khalqi subfactions have also aligned according to links with the former Khalqi presidents of Afghanistan, Taraki and Amin, and other groups have formed around local leaders. Intrafactional rivalry sometimes erupts in violence. Several shooting incidents have occurred in Paktia Province among groups identified with Taraki, Amin, and two local leaders.

[redacted]

[redacted] the Parchamis began a campaign in early 1983 to reduce the Khalqi presence in KHAD and the Ministry of Interior by appointing Parchamis to all new positions. [redacted]

Conscription is another serious factional issue. At the 12th plenum Gulabzoi opposed the recall of men mustered out as late as 1981, arguing that the policy would have severe effects on the Afghan economy, according to US Embassy reports. Several US Embassy sources report that Gulabzoi challenged the



Babrak Karmal [redacted]

Sygma ©

Parchamis to conscript the "tens of thousands" of draft age men working for KHAD, which is heavily staffed by Parchamis. In October 1982 the dispute crossed factional lines, [redacted]

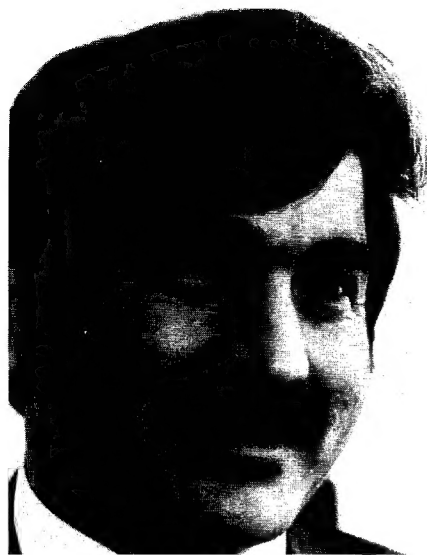
[redacted] when the Parchami Minister of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs supported Gulabzoi in opposing conscription of Pathan tribesmen. The abortive regime attempt to conscript tribesmen nevertheless has overtones of factionalism, since most Khalqis have ties with the Pathan tribal area. [redacted]

Factional tensions frequently escalate to include charges of disloyalty. [redacted]

the Parchami-dominated KHAD has accused Khalqis of refusing to fight against the insurgents; of selling or giving away weapons, ammunition, and equipment to the insurgents; and of claiming that the insurgents are better than the Parchamis. At the 12th plenum, Khalqis accused Parchamis of "selling" Afghanistan to the Soviets, [redacted]

Khalqis also have criticized the Parchami regime's policy of indiscriminate bombing of civilians, according to US Embassy reports. [redacted]





Muhammad Gulabzoi [redacted] Liaison ©

## Effects of Factionalism

### Undermining Security

In our view, factionalism contributes substantially to the ineffectiveness of the Afghan armed forces. It plays a role in armed clashes, low morale, insufficient manpower, collaboration with insurgents, and undermining of security. [redacted]

**Armed Clashes.** [redacted] factionalism has prompted several armed clashes that have resulted in the deaths of military and political personnel. In the extreme, intraparty feuding has escalated into attempts to overthrow the government.

[redacted] in spring 1983 an attempted coup by Khalqi junior officers in Kabul caused fighting in several garrisons that resulted in at least 10 Khalqi deaths. [redacted]

[redacted] an insurgent group consisting solely of former Khalqis has been established in Pakistan and has been carrying out limited operations in southeastern Afghanistan against regime forces. Although the Khalqi group claims to have no political ambitions, other insurgent groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan distrust the band and do not cooperate with it, [redacted]

Soviet and regime forces also have been affected by the factional disputes. [redacted] Khalqis, motivated by vengeance, had killed a number of Soviets in and around Kabul. [redacted] a year later Khalqi troops fired on Soviet forces in Paghman who were shooting civilians. Also in summer 1983, several days of fighting occurred between Khalqi and Parchami officers of the 25th Division. [redacted] The fighting began when a Khalqi officer burned a weapons depot belonging to a company commanded by a Parchami, destroying over 1,000 cases of ammunition, hundreds of rifles and uniforms, and 10,000 liters of gasoline. Similar clashes occurred in the Herat area in late summer 1983, according to US Embassy sources. Though reports conflict, the clashes apparently involved Khalqi-dominated police forces from the Ministry of Interior and Parchami-dominated military units. The fighting caused over 100 casualties. [redacted]

[redacted] factional feuding often flares at local gatherings of party members. During a party meeting in July 1983 in Farah Province, a Khalqi and a Parchami shot each other in an argument over factional excesses. In Balkh Province a former party secretary and three others were hanged in November 1983 for the murder of a Parchami official, according to US Embassy and Kabul press reports. The hangings set off a new round of violent incidents between the factions. [redacted]

**Desertions, Collaboration With Insurgents.** We believe that factionalism had a role in massive defections from regime forces during 1983. According to US Embassy reports, a rash of desertions from the 25th Division in Paktia was sparked by the replacement of a Khalqi officer with a hardline Parchami. Communist troops in the 25th Division are predominantly Khalqi, and photographs of former Khalqi presidents Taraki and Amin are still displayed on messhall walls. [redacted]

[redacted] factional tensions in Jalalabad also were a prime factor in several desertions from the 11th

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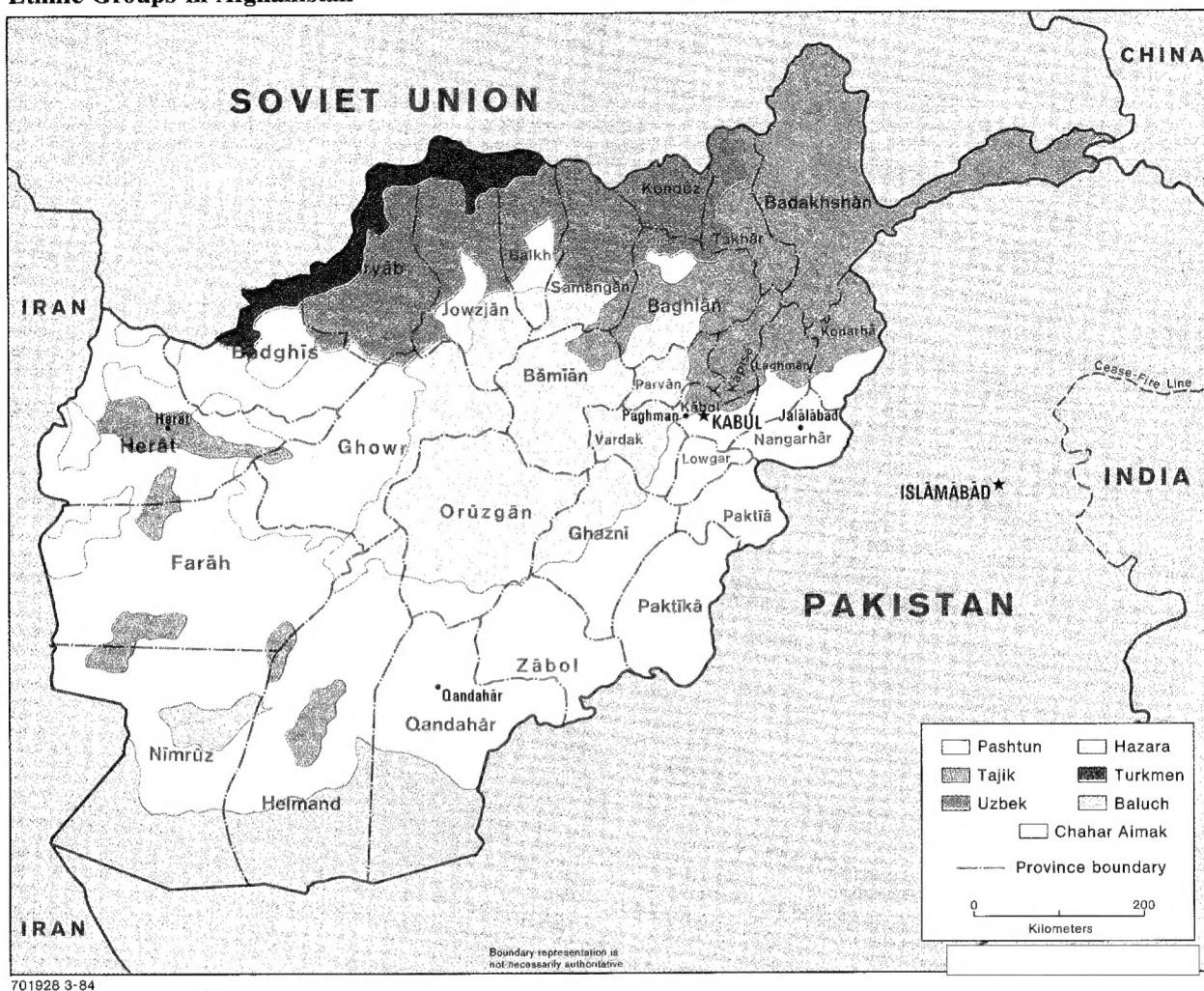
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**Figure 1**  
**Ethnic Groups in Afghanistan**



Division. They were prompted by the arrest in June 1983 of the deputy secretary of the party committee for Nangarhar Province, a Khalqi, who was accused of colluding with insurgents.irate Khalqis threatened violence, and the official was released after the personal intervention of the party zone chief, a Parchami.

A desire for vengeance and rivalry over military promotions have caused a number of Khalqis to collaborate with insurgents.

Khalqi military personnel

seeking revenge on Parchamis had transferred arms and supplied information to insurgents, refused to carry out orders, and urged other soldiers to defect.

Khalqi officers in Qandahar grew resentful over promotions in April 1983 that favored Parchamis. The consequent drop in morale led insurgent leaders in Qandahar to expect more desertions as well as offers by the troops to supply information. Later that summer insurgent leaders claimed they were obtaining more intelligence

than ever before. Following large-scale insurgent attacks on Kabul in mid-August 1983, the US Embassy reported widespread rumors that at least some of the operations were coordinated with anti-Soviet Khalqis who took the opportunity to settle scores with Parchamis and KHAD agents. In late autumn 1983, US Embassy sources reported continuing evidence of contacts and cooperation between Khalqis and insurgents in Kabul. [ ]

**Urban Security, Assassinations.** In our view, factionalism plays a significant role in undermining security in several cities, especially Kabul. We estimate that some 30 assassinations occur in the capital each month as a result of factionalism. [ ] regime leaders have described as "frightening" the number of Parchamis assassinated in Kabul. An Interior Ministry official has stated that intraparty feuding is responsible for more political assassinations in the capital than can be blamed on insurgents. KHAD reports [ ] indicate that a group of Afghan military officers, presumably Khalqis, has been responsible for assassinating several Parchamis. [ ]

Sabotage appears to be another outgrowth of factionalism. [ ] in autumn 1983 a bomb was discovered and defused at the headquarters of the Parchami-dominated KHAD, and a few days later a bomb exploded in the corridor outside the office of KHAD's First Deputy. [ ]

#### Impeding Government Operations

In our view, factionalism often diverts government leaders from the tasks of formulating and implementing government policy. [ ] sessions of the 12th plenum in July 1983 were consumed in angry disputes—generally divided along factional lines—over promotions and appointments. The meeting had to be adjourned temporarily after the discussions threatened to get out of hand, and the Soviet Ambassador was called in to mediate. [ ]

Perhaps the main factional impediment to the effective functioning of the government is the strife between the Khalqi-dominated Ministry of Interior on the one hand, and the Parchami-dominated KHAD and Ministry of Defense on the other. [ ]

[ ] the Defense Ministry is charged with waging war against the resistance, KHAD is responsible for organizing negotiations to win over resistance groups and for counterrevolutionary activities, and the Interior Ministry is charged with guarding roads and economic installations. These functions often overlap, and serious problems frequently arise between the agencies over regime tactics. For example, Khalqi opposition to Parchami attempts to conscript traditionally exempt tribesmen in the southeastern border region in 1983 and the tribesmen's consequent resentment were major factors in frustrating regime efforts to interdict insurgent supply lines. [ ]

We believe the Parchamis' distrust of Khalqis has led to diversion of counterintelligence expertise and hampered Khalqis in KHAD from performing their duties. [ ] in winter 1983 the Parchamis attempted to reduce Khalqi power by establishing a new ministerial directorate, designated KHAD-Ministry of the Interior, subordinate to KHAD rather than to the Interior Ministry. This directorate was formed to serve as a counterintelligence unit to monitor Khalqis in the ministry and is headed by a staunch Parchami. Earlier, [ ] key Khalqi officials in KHAD were placed on "reserve status," and the Khalqi Second Deputy of KHAD was purged from his position. [ ]

Parchami attempts to protect themselves and weaken security for Khalqis have paradoxically augmented the power of Interior Minister Gulabzoi. [ ] the regime has prohibited most Khalqis from carrying or possessing sidearms, a policy that has caused many Khalqis to apply to the provincial police force, controlled by Gulabzoi. [ ]

A source of frustration for the Soviets, [ ] has been the refusal of the Kabul city police to share information with the Ministry of [ ]

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Interior. The city police, in conjunction with KHAD, regard security incidents in Kabul as strictly their business and have so far successfully excluded the provincial police run by the Ministry of Interior. As with KHAD, most of the senior city police officers are Parchamis, and they fear that Khalqis would use information on security incidents to discredit them.

### Soviet Measures

The Soviets have attempted to deal with Afghan Communist disunity by taking an evenhanded approach to both factions and by trying to build a monolithic party through indoctrination. Although permitting Babrak to surround himself with Parchami loyalists, the Soviets have supported Interior Minister Gulabzoi and other important Khalqis. In winter 1983, [ ] Gulabzoi signed agreements with the Soviets to guarantee delivery of weapons and supplies directly to his ministry's logistics office, apparently to prevent Parchamis from diverting the shipments. [ ] Gulabzoi, despite being a Parchami target, has remained a "favorite son" of the Soviets and been permitted to build a formidable military force in the provincial police command. [ ]

The evenhanded Soviet approach includes the removal of the most uncompromising factional leaders from the Afghan scene for long periods—through ambassadorial assignments or "training" in the Soviet Union. Among those removed have been Assadollah Sarwari, a highly partisan Khalqi who was made Ambassador to Mongolia, and Lt. Gen. Muhammad Rafi, who recently returned to Kabul after two years of "training" in the Soviet Union. [ ] Rafi, a Parchami zealot, had advocated a complete purge of the Khalqi faction. [ ]

Moscow is also trying to dilute factional influence over the long term through indoctrination and expansion of the party membership. [ ] the party in spring 1983 was sending hundreds of young members to the USSR every 90 days for six-month courses in party work. Afghan ministry employees, [ ]

[ ] are required to attend political indoctrination sessions, and the party is continually seeking new members. Building membership, however, has had little effect on the party rift because the factions immediately co-opt new members. [ ]

### Outlook

The aura of regime instability created by factionalism is so intense that, nearly every time a high-level Afghan official visits Moscow, rumors spread throughout Kabul that the official or other personnel are about to be dumped. We believe that such perceptions will continue to diminish the government's capacity to function and contribute to low morale, insecurity, and opportunism. [ ]

Party factionalism also will remain a problem for the regime and the Soviet Union over the next several years. The Parchamis probably will continue to augment their authority at the expense of the Khalqis over the short term. Substantial Khalqi power in the provincial police and in the military, however, will prevent the Babrak regime from risking a full-scale purge, which probably would result in widespread insurrection in the government and military. [ ]

We believe the Soviets are not likely to use force to purge either faction because of the risk of widespread insurrection. Even an attempt to purge Khalqis in the military would not be feasible, given the Soviet and regime desire to rebuild the already undermanned forces. Strife caused by vengeful Khalqis is probably not sufficiently serious to cause Soviet abandonment of Interior Minister Gulabzoi. Such a move would alienate other influential Khalqis, who would have even greater cause to support the insurgency. Recent instances of Soviet support for Gulabzoi indicate that Moscow will, for the short term at least, continue to back both factions. Along with the Soviets' need to retain influence over Khalqis in the military, Moscow may also wish to maintain the Khalqis as a potential counterweight against the Parchamis, particularly should the Soviets decide to replace Babrak Karmal.

Meanwhile, we believe Moscow will continue attempts to indoctrinate the next generation of party members, with the aim of eliminating factionalism.

[REDACTED]

Unless either faction presents an outright threat to the Soviet presence, Moscow will probably continue its current policy of evenhandedness while permitting Parchami dominance. Over the long term, that policy will lead to a greater erosion of Khalqi power and increasingly firm Parchami control. Because of the fractious nature of Afghans, however, new rivalries will probably arise even within Parchami ranks and continue to disrupt party work, though probably neither so frequently nor so violently as at present.

[REDACTED]

Given the long-term outlook for continued factionalism, a strong, unified government in Kabul is unlikely for many years. The Soviets will probably remain in Afghanistan indefinitely because they have little hope of creating a regime that will ensure stability and continued pro-Soviet orientation.

[REDACTED]

- Soviet manpower and economic resources are required to indoctrinate party members to overcome factionalism.
- The instability that factionalism creates belies Soviet claims about the Babrak regime's legitimacy, diminishing its influence in international forums such as the United Nations and conferences of the nonaligned nations.

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### Implications for the United States

Communist factionalism serves US interests by frustrating Soviet attempts to consolidate control in Afghanistan, hampering security measures in Kabul, and impeding the effectiveness of the Afghan Government and armed forces:

- Factionalism requires the Soviets to divert manpower from the struggle against the insurgents to oversee the functioning of the Afghan regime and ensure the operation of the Afghan armed forces.
- Collaboration with the insurgents grows out of factionalism, increasing the costs of the war to the Soviets.

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